

Gothic inspiration pure magic

Puppeteer Asphyxia took the leap from circus trapeze to 'making things' - and couldn't be happier, writes **Anika Hume**

SWAPPING a life traversing the globe as a circus performer for one cooped inside a cluttered attic doesn't initially seem appealing. But that is exactly what puppeteer Asphyxia did - and she couldn't be happier.

"For me, making the puppets meant hours and hours in my tiny loft studio, fiddling around with fabrics, stitching, painting, sculpting and building," she says. "But I really love making things - nothing gives me more pleasure than being creative."

Her efforts of a year and a half will be seen in *The Grimstones - Hatched*, which opens on July 21. The Grimstones, a magical marionette family, include a girl who reads dreams, a baby boy with three legs, a mother who sews garments lined with joy, and a grandfather who heals people with his magical potions.

"It's very much a mix of Edward Scissorhands and Harry Potter in that it's got the dark aesthetic, the threads of magic and mystery," Asphyxia says.

The Melbourne-based performer, who has been deaf since the age of three, initially joined the circus.

"I was hungry for a physical discipline which gave me the freedom to be deaf, to be different," she says.

After training with the National Institute of Circus Arts, Asphyxia created several shows, including *Blood Makes Noise*, which performed to sell-out houses in the US.

A chance encounter with a Guatemalan marionette master encouraged her to trade her trapeze for puppetry. She turned to Gothic-themed films such as *The Addams Family* and *A Series of Unfortunate Events* for inspiration, and added her experiences growing up.

"I was totally into Gothic clothes and jewellery as a teen," she says. "My love for the Gothic aesthetic was still inside me, just waiting to be expressed through a new puppet show."

Asphyxia says *The Grimstones* breaks all the rules of traditional marionette theatre. "I wanted to take this old form of

theatre and present it in a new and innovative way.

"We (puppet controllers) are not concealed behind a velvet curtain, we walk through the set and the stage, and we even interact with the puppets."

Perhaps the most innovative element is that the performance uses both sign language and verbal narration. An optional 45-minute signing workshop is offered after the show.

"For hearing audiences, this is often quite educational, for deaf audiences it validates their lifestyle, and for young deaf audiences it provides a positive role model," she says. "The show explores themes of

family love and acceptance, and I hope the audience will take away an awareness of the importance of acceptance of those who are different."

The Grimstones - Hatched is on from July 21 to 25 at the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts, Fortitude Valley. Info and bookings 3872 9000 or www.jwcca.qld.gov.au



DARK AESTHETIC: The Grimstones, a magical marionette family, are the creation of puppeteer Asphyxia (above).



Art beat Suzanna Clarke

Go-Go-Go

I DON'T know exactly what Go-Go-Go, billed as "the world's largest go-go dancing spectacle" has in common with the return of Harvest Rain's *Joseph* at QPAC, but it's an innovative way to attract attention. On July 25 at noon, choreographer Callum Mansfield is set to lead what is hoped to be "the largest group of go-go dancers ever assembled" at the Cultural Forecourt outside the QPAC Playhouse. They are calling for participants 14 years and over to register to join the cast of *Joseph* in what sounds like a fun event. www.harvestrain.com.au or 3108 7438.

Thursday on Friday

I'LL BE making the journey to Thursday Island for the opening of the Queensland Music Festival this Friday. It kicks off with *Hidden Republic*, a concert by The Black Arm Band - 25 indigenous singers, songwriters, musicians and performers backed by 33 members of the Queensland Youth Symphony. You can see it without having to fly there on a live webcast in Brisbane Square, at the top of the Queen Street Mall, from 5.30pm tomorrow.

My Generation

HAVING a chat with like-minded types over coffee or a drink after a movie, or going to an informative talk about an exhibition can greatly enhance the experience. The Queensland Art Gallery has introduced a program called My Gen aimed at baby boomers (55 to 75-year-olds) where groups are invited to do just this. Gallery director Tony Ellwood says: "It is certainly not restricted to this group, as we acknowledge that age is an attitude for any generation." Today at 11am there is a talk at GoMA by Julie Ewington, curatorial manager of Australian Art, on the work of artist Tim Johnson. Following that, on August 19 at 2pm, is a screening of James Cameron's 1997 film *Titanic*, followed by a discussion from 5.30pm; August 20 at 11am is another talk by Diane Moon, curator of the *Floating Life* indigenous fibre exhibition. No bookings required. Info: www.qag.qld.gov.au

Something happening on the art scene? Let us know by emailing clarkes@qnp.newsltd.com.au.

Undies and outbursts

"IT'S *Sex and the City* on steroids," says director Simone de Haas of her new play *Angry Young Women in Low-Rise Jeans with High-Class Issues*.

"It's a bit outrageous, it's a little bit raunchy, a bit confrontational in its language at times, but nonetheless hysterical."

Due to open on July 16, the production combines a series of monologues and farces presented in a similar style to stand up comedy - each deals with issues young women face, from shrinking undie sizes to that "first time".

"In one of the monologues, a girl's mother and father have given her entirely unrealistic notions of men and the character has gotten into trouble as a result," says de Haas, 52, from Brisbane's Auchenflower.

"Another of the pieces is full of emotional outbursts, when the hormones in the young girl's body are thrown off balance from going on the pill."

Despite some heavy content, de Haas (pictured) says she refused to let the show take "the soapbox slant". She says that although the issues are real, as a theatre company their job is "to provide some light relief, not to preach to the audience or try and change the world".

"*Angry Young Women* is not just a little giggle about big issues, it's literally

exhausting to watch because you're made to laugh so hard."

It's produced by Mixed Company Theatre of Comedy, whose previous play was *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress*. De Haas says Brisbane's promising young talent pool meant that she expanded the cast to 10 actors.

"We had so many women, it was really hard to choose just a few for the show," she says.

One such talent is Lauren Dillon, who describes the show as "just one big cake mix" of personalities and issues. "I've never worked on a script like this before, it's a very unusual play which is quite different from anything else," she says.

Fellow actor Frankie Savige does not regard herself as naturally funny, so finds it ironic she has been cast in comedies lately.

"I've done *The Importance of Being Earnest* with the Queensland Theatre Company, but still that was nothing like this," she says. She believes the play has more in common with the TV's *Sex and the City*.

"You'll wish you could take your Cosmopolitan (cocktail) in with you."

Angry Young Women in Low-Rise Jeans with High-Class Issues, Visy Theatre, Brisbane Powerhouse, New Farm, July 16 to 25. Info and bookings 3358 8600 or www.brisbanepowerhouse.org

Anika Hume

